

CONCLUSIONS

I find that the recommended plan to provide a new lock 110- x 36- x 1200-feet at the IHNC as developed in this report and EIS is based on a thorough analysis and evaluation of all practicable alternatives, in view of applicable economic, engineering and environmental criteria. The report responds to WRDA 86 (PL 99-662) and subsequent Congressional guidance in the Committee reports of the U.S. House and Senate Appropriations Committees in conjunction with the FY-91 budget and documents the events leading to a recommendation.

I have given consideration to the risks and uncertainties associated with the unpredictability of future traffic on the waterway system and developments in navigation technology. Traffic on the waterway system in the area is projected to grow at a medium rate which I believe is reasonable. With this in mind, the IHNC lock will continue to experience significant delays and be unable to efficiently service the existing and future traffic unless action is taken to replace the existing lock.

I also understand the Port's concerns and their desire for a deep-draft facility in order to fully utilize existing facilities and insure the future viability and competitiveness of the port.

The bridge-only alternative and the phased construction approach (building a mid-level bridge now and building the rest of the lock project at a future date) would have significant negative impacts to the local communities on either side of the canal. Lack of public acceptance for the proposed bridge-only plan and any phased construction approach would make implementation virtually impossible and would not adhere to the Congressional direction of ensuring that communities adjacent to the project remain as complete, livable neighborhoods during and after construction of the project and giving maximum consideration to lock replacement alternatives which minimizes residential and business disruption while meeting the goals of improving waterborne commerce. In addition, the bridge only alternative does not maximize net benefits, and, even though it may offer a good rate of return on the investment, it does not qualify for recommendation because of the total lack of local support.

The social, environmental, and economic effects and engineering feasibility of the recommended plan and a wide range of alternative plans to address the problem and needs have been evaluated over time. Our analysis reveals that the existing navigation problems can best be solved, the needs met, and the opportunities realized through construction of the recommended

plan - a new lock north of Claiborne Avenue using a precast, post-tensioned, floated-in technique.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS.

Natural Environment. The recommended plan has moderate impacts on the natural environment. The plan would require disposal of approximately 3 million cubic yards of dredged material, have slightly greater releases of lock water than the current lock and would result, in time, in increased vessel traffic on the GIWW-East. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has reviewed the proposed plan and provided comments in their Coordination Act Report (CAR). Refer to Volume 6. A part of the dredged materials that are not considered contaminated, will be used beneficially to create marsh and mitigate for the loss of wetlands at the graving site. Special recognition has been afforded wetlands because they are a unique and are considered a nationally important natural resource.

Human Environment. There are no residential relocations associated with the proposed project. The recommended plan will have significantly less impact on the neighborhoods than plans previously evaluated and proposed. These impacts have been minimized to the extent practical. The District, in conjunction with the Port of New Orleans, and with input from the affected neighborhoods, has developed a mitigation plan to ameliorate the impacts expected to result from construction of the project. The direct and indirect impacts of the project on the neighborhoods require mitigation in order to implement the project. The mitigation plan was developed in coordination with various local stakeholders through a neighborhood working group process. During construction, vehicular traffic will be inconvenienced but no major long-term detouring will be required. At St. Claude Avenue, a temporary bridge will handle the same local and commuter traffic that currently uses that route. Temporary shutdown of about 2 - 4 weeks at Claiborne Avenue will impact vehicular traffic. Some noise will also be associated with construction of the project. However, contemporary pile driving techniques, such as vibratory hammers and underwater hydraulic hammers, will significantly reduce those impacts.

The recommended plan, including all of the measures comprising the community impact mitigation plan, is probably the only plan that could ever reasonably be constructed at the IHNC to address the navigation problems in a comprehensive fashion. While there is localized opposition, all of the other plans

investigated over time have encountered significantly more opposition. Continued pursuit of any of those plans would only result in more delays, with tremendous costs being incurred, only to be deadlocked.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

Construction of the new lock, as planned, will eliminate congestion and delays to navigation and provide a safer, more efficient connection in the waterway system. In addition, vehicular traffic will benefit from proposed bridge improvements.

The Port of New Orleans, an agency of the State of Louisiana, has indicated their willingness to pay for the incremental cost of the deep-draft lock.

The recommended plan meets the needs of both shallow and deep-draft navigation over the life of the project and the primary objective of providing a more efficient connection for commercial navigation between the Mississippi River and the GIWW and MR-GO.

ENGINEERING CONSIDERATIONS

None of the plans for constructing a new lock north of Claiborne Avenue would be readily reversible since they provide for construction of a large permanent structure, permanent bridge modifications at Claiborne Avenue, and a new bridge at St. Claude Avenue. The design and pre-cast, float-in construction technique proposed for the new lock reflect current proven technology that has been adapted to lock construction. The location recommended, coupled with the construction technique proposed, has significantly reduced the project impacts over conventional construction. When implemented, the project will fulfill the objectives of improving navigation efficiency and increasing the capacity at the IHNC lock. The proposed project incorporates lay areas, not currently available at the existing lock, which will facilitate movement of navigation traffic and make operation of the IHNC safer after the project is in service. The flow of vehicular traffic in and out of the area will also be improved as a result of the temporary and permanent bridges and other related improvements for vehicular traffic.

PUBLIC INTEREST CONSIDERATIONS

On balance, I believe it is in the overall public interest to construct the recommended plan. The recommended plan is the most desirable plan for increasing the lock capacity to accommodate the largest vessels that might reasonably make use of

the lock. This plan has been developed in coordination with the Port of New Orleans, navigation interests, the neighborhoods, and the business community. Planning efforts have also been coordinated with local officials. The location of the proposed new lock at the IHNC minimizes impacts on the community compared to other plans considered in the past. Based on coordination with all stakeholders, we believe we have developed a plan that accommodates most stakeholders. The recommended plan addresses the problems in a manner consistent with the environment, provides for the future, and considers community concerns in a way that is not afforded with other plans, including the no action and the bridge-only plans.